

THE GENESIS OF MACAULAY'S HISTORY

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I have now made up my mind to change my plan about my History. I will first set myself to know the whole subject ; to get, by reading and travelling, a full acquaintance with William's reign. I reckon that it will take me eighteen months to do this. I must visit Holland, Belgium, Scotland, Ireland, France. The Dutch archives and French archives must be ransacked. I will see whether anything is to be got from other diplomatic collections. I must see Londonderry, the Boyne, Aghrim, Limerick, Kinsale, Namur again, Landen, Steinkirk. I must turn over hundreds, thousands, of pamphlets. Lambeth, the Bodleian and the other Oxford libraries, the Devonshire Papers, the British Museum, must be explored, and notes made : and then I shall go to work. When the materials are ready, and the History mapped out in my mind, I ought easily to write on an average two of my pages daily. In two years from the time I begin writing I shall have more than finished my second part. Then I reckon a year for polishing, retouching, and printing.¹

A few notes from his diary show the progress of his plans, and his method of getting up the literature of the subject.

June 28. After breakfast to the Museum, and sat till three, reading and making extracts. I turned over three volumes of newspapers and tracts ; Flying Posts, Post-boys, and Postmen. I found some curious things which will be of direct service ; but the chief advantage of these

researches is that the mind is transported back a century and a half, and gets familiar with the ways of thinking, and with the habits, of a past generation.

June 29. To the British Museum, and read and extracted there till five. I find a growing pleasure in this employment. The reign of William the Third, so mysterious to me a few weeks ago, is beginning to take a clear form. I begin to see the men, and to understand all their difficulties and jealousies.²

¹ Journal, Feb. 8, 1849. Ibid. pp. 218-19.

³ Journal, 1849. Ibid. p. 260.